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# Living territories to transform the world

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## General conclusion and outlook

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Across countries and world regions, and for different reasons, there is a persistent fear that current trends will ultimately lead to a complete marginalization of rural territories. Instead of subscribing to the often-expressed fatalistic view that rural populations will relocate to ever larger metropolises and that agricultural production will then find itself concentrated in a few breadbaskets, we have chosen to explore ways in this book that show on the contrary how strong are the dynamics of development in rural areas and how vibrant the innovation processes. The analyses and experiences shared here demonstrate various ways of preserving the vitality and diversity of rural territories, of making them more dynamic and of building up their ability to contribute to the challenges of sustainable development, including at national and global scales.

### WHAT, FINALLY, IS A TERRITORY?

Over a span of just three decades, the term 'territory' has become a ubiquitous term, not only in the proliferation of publications that appropriate it, but also in its increasing mobilization in public action (Chapter 3). The term is generally perceived as a platform for virtuous dynamics: crucibles of participatory approaches, territories are considered laboratories in which new forms of governance are invented and tested. As frameworks for sustainable development, territories are expected to allow the emergence of alternative and pluralistic models of development, in contrast to the exclusive dominance of a model based solely on economic growth and competition (Chapter 2).

All of the contributions collected in this book subscribe to these perceptions, offering an overview of the forms and modalities of the use of the 'territory' in research concerning rural areas in the Global South and in their development. The second part of the book consists of short chapters describing work done and experiments conducted in which the territories described are far from constituting a homogeneous frame of reference. The differences between them pertain to the themes addressed, the contexts, the definition, concept and perception themselves of the territory, and,



finally, the way in which territories are mobilized in research activities and in action to meet the challenges of development. The structure of the book attempts to account for and illustrate this diversity (see the Introduction).

We note that the concept of the territory results from the embedding in the geographical space of a set of social, economic, cultural and political processes involving the participation of systems of local actors and of those external actors who are involved locally (Vanier, 2009). Nevertheless, given the diversity of situations, trying to define the territory remains a tall order, and it is futile to try to reduce the notion to a single definition (Lévy and Lussault, 2003). Our own conception is pluralistic and it is in this sense that we have chosen to approach similar notions such as that of the landscape (Chapter 1).

Similarly, the manner of addressing the territory varies and there exist a great diversity of analyses depending on the disciplines concerned. Scientific approaches often oscillate between an analysis of the territory as a 'political subject' or a 'social subject' (Vanier, 2009). Social geography is more concerned with the territory's dimension of identity, and thus highlights relationships of belonging and anchoring (Di Méo and Buléon, 2005) and their impact on the organization of geographical spaces. Political geography, on the other hand, endeavours to shed light on the representation of the territory by studying the mechanisms of public action (Debarbieux and Vanier, 2002; Faure and Négrier, 2007). The approaches to the territory as 'ecological subject', 'agroecological subject' or 'technical subject' are not far behind, and give rise to the exploration of the diversity of the biological and technical processes that take place there and the actions implemented to steer and act on these processes.

The themes addressed in the second and third parts of this book illustrate these multi-faceted approaches. The chapters in these parts deal with territories with very variable dimensions and contours. In some cases, the territories are imposed and thus demarcated by political and administrative boundaries, those of the territorial authority (as in Chapter 7, which discusses a territorial public policy, with a clearly delineated municipal boundary). Elsewhere, territories can be entities marked out by a specific boundary pertaining to particular infrastructure facilities or a legal status and constituted around the management of resources, whether protected areas (Chapter 24), irrigation schemes (Chapter 5) or forest concessions (Chapter 30). Territorial boundaries may also correspond to the precise limits of biophysical characteristics, as in the case of watersheds analyzed through the establishment of an observatory (Chapter 34). They are sometimes defined by the identification of the territories of life of their inhabitants (Chapter 27). Other studies deal with a territory with blurred and shifting contours, defined by a development issue: this is the case of health management in Chapter 14, the control of agroecological processes (Chapters 15, 16 and 23), processes of appropriation (territorialization in the context of cashew nut cultivation in Burkina Faso in Chapter 26 or the stabilization of agricultural frontiers in Amazonia in Chapter 7) or processes of innovation, and of the search for 'spontaneous' coordination and synergy (Chapter 8 in the domain of fish farming, Chapter 18 for livestock farming, Chapter 21 for the strengthening of agrifood systems, Chapter 22 for waste recycling). These territories are sometimes



even those of migration or mobilities, whose changing and flexible boundaries are defined by the exchanges between actors and their representations of what binds them together, such as the multi-sited territories discussed in Chapter 20. Thus, some chapters refer to the territory in the administrative or institutional sense of the term and to the design or implementation of public policies and territorial governance (combining policies of conservation with those of development in Mexico in Chapter 28 or encouraging territorial development policies in Brazil in Chapter 29). Others concern the constitution and institutionalization of territories whose relevance derives from the engine and the social group that drive them (protected areas and forest concessions in Chapters 24 and 30).

The political contexts in which these territories are situated also vary. The State's intervention in local life may be stronger (as in Tunisia, Chapter 27, or in Brazil, Chapter 29) or more muted (as in Burkina Faso, Chapter 26), depending on the how far along are the processes of decentralization. Diversity is also found in legal and fiscal contexts, as shown in Chapter 35, which focuses on funding mechanisms and tools. And, finally, diverse too are the land-tenure and migration dynamics, as in the case of agricultural frontiers (Chapters 7 and 30), intersecting with those of long-demarcated areas, including administratively. These ever-changing contexts are thus those of differentiated forms of territorial frameworks, in which the nesting of the territorial hierarchy sometimes gives way to multiple and embedded territories, defined by their own drivers and challenges.

The book thus offers a panoramic overview of territorial diversity but also of the complex processes of embeddedness discussed in its first part. It thus illustrates that the 'contemporary production of local territories no longer depends exclusively on the administrative framework of the national territory on the one hand, nor on the management of municipal public services on the other, but rather on a logic of a search for multi-faceted territories of development, in the sense of spaces of mobilization of various potential actors of local development around a project' (Antheaume and Giraut, 2005). It reveals the capacity of rural territories to ensure stability and security (OECD, FAO, UNCDF, 2016). It shows how agriculture – the world's largest employer – can contribute to a revival of these rural territories so that they can provide their inhabitants and, more globally, the whole world, the full gamut of economic, social and environmental services essential to peace and social cohesion: well-being, food and nutritional security, human and environmental health, anticipation of and adaptation to climate change, energy transitions, distributed economic growth and decent jobs, equity, and anticipation and prevention of disputes and conflicts.

## **THE TERRITORY: AN INNOVATION FRAMEWORK AND A SPACE FOR COORDINATION AND REGULATION**

Despite the diversity of contexts, reference bases and issues, the case studies presented in the book demonstrate marked convergences. In particular, they highlight increasing recognition of and recourse to the concept of the territory. As in the case of tropical agricultural chains (Biénabe *et al.*, 2017a), the territory exhibits its capacity to behave as an innovation framework and a space for coordination and regulation.



## The territory as an innovation framework

The territory constitutes a framework for social or technical, organizational or institutional, individual or collective innovation. Thus, with the territory as framework, new forms of management of resources (subpart 2.1), of organization of agricultural production (subpart 2.2) and services – especially environmental ones – (subpart 2.3), of derivation of economic value from specific resources (subpart 2.4) and of design of public policy (subpart 2.5) are devised and implemented.

Using the example of the expansion of fish farming, Chapter 8 shows how innovation can be based very decisively on territorial characteristics and how it is thus stimulated. In the case of Guinée Forestière (Forested Guinea), it is based on deriving value from the many lowlands and the collective know-how on rice cultivation, leading to a mutually beneficial association between these two activities. We see here, as in the other examples, how closely interwoven are the biological, technical and institutional dimensions of the processes of innovation.

In other words, the territory produces innovation and specifies it. On the role of territorial planning in innovations concerning cropping systems, Chapter 11 shows that organizational innovation can be a prerequisite for technical change. It shows how the dissemination of a new cropping system may require a reorganization of uses between agriculture and livestock husbandry and, for this reason, coordination between the various territorial actors.

However, the territory is more than a mere framework mobilized for innovation. Localized agrifood systems presented in Chapter 21 illustrate this capacity of territories to stimulate the emergence of organizational and institutional innovations, to themselves become drivers of change. The derivation of value from products of terroirs is certainly the most striking example. The case of organic waste recycling, based on a system of interdependencies activated at the territorial level through a new organization of organic matter flows (Chapter 22), is another example of innovation conceived and implemented by and for a territory's actors. Because of the proximities and the forms of social capital that constitute it, the territory is, in fact, a form of organization that permits the internalization of certain transaction costs, the minimizing of economic risks, the facilitation of learning processes, the leveraging of know-how and traditional knowledge, the guaranteeing of the application of quality criteria to a product or a form of production, etc., all the characteristics that make it an asset that can be mobilized in the processes of production, especially agricultural production (Angeon *et al.*, 2006; Pecqueur, 2004; Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007; Courlet and Pecqueur, 1992; Boucher, 2004). As the examples in this book show, the projection of a territory in the future and in its environment, and in what are known as 'competitive advantages', thus depend fundamentally on its ability to explore its biophysical, social, economic and institutional specificities, and, through innovation, derive value from them.

In all the examples described, the territory's organization is the basis and cause of the dynamics of innovation: access to resources of land, labour, production and exchanges are inserted in a local system of social and power relationships whose unique



combination stimulates (or, on the contrary, hinders) the dynamics of cooperation, coordination and information generation and sharing. The concepts of networks of social actors and of governance are thus central to this capacity for innovation. And these innovations transform territories in return. Chapter 25, focusing on the analysis of learning processes in territorial development projects in Brazil and Bhutan, explores this dual issue of the coordination processes at work in innovation and their impact on the territory concerned. It shows how territories are transformed through reflective practices carried out by their actors.

Finally, these examples illustrate how innovation also helps make territories more resilient. On the management of pests in an insular context, Chapter 15 shows how this resilience and the adoption of new practices depend on the articulation of a precise knowledge of epidemiological and bioregulation phenomena with an integrated organization of the sector and the management of the territories by the actors.

### **The territory as a space for coordination and regulation**

Given a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be seized, territories are frameworks of collective action within which a community of interests and action can be identified. Very notably, territories are the meeting place between institutional development projects and local initiatives. New forms of territorial governance are proposed that are based on coordination between producers, i.e., users of a shared resource. Emphasis is placed on organizations that eschew a hierarchical and vertical form of government and instead adopt horizontal coordination, concertation and negotiation. We move from the governance of rural areas by a single authority to a set of governance processes in which all the actors share authority. Power relationships seem to be supplemented, and even sometimes replaced, by new forms of solidarity: professional solidarity, neighbourhood solidarity, class solidarity, solidarity of user communities, and solidarity of interests (Godard, 1993; Lascoumes, 1994).

It is this type of governance that Chapter 14 invites us to recognize and promote for an improved management of human and animal health. In a similar way, Chapter 16 shows how a territorial approach to the control of invasive species is based on mechanisms of concertation and coordination between all the actors, with an agreement on the actions to be implemented necessarily based on a comparison of the various points of view. These examples furthermore show that the territory is also the framework for the application of standards or reference bases of action, whose construction not only concerns the local environment but also strongly influences the design of national and local policies. These increasingly numerous standards are modifying the modalities of local public action. But they are also translated, i.e., adapted, circumvented, diverted and reinvented, by local actors, so that they can in turn circulate and spread to different levels of organization and possibly themselves contribute to change. This is what Chapter 14 shows, as does Chapter 35 in the context of the financing of development projects.

This regulatory function is also expressed in the domain of land tenure, whether it is to affirm the importance of legal pluralism (Chapter 31) or to anticipate problems



of land grabbing (Chapter 4). This function is essential to address environmental concerns: taking issues of sustainable development in an agricultural frontier context into account (case of Amazonia in Chapter 7), organization of production services (Chapters 15 and 17), the use of biodiversity through the creation of protected areas (Chapter 17), the control of invasive species (Chapter 16), the organization of waste recycling chains based on territorial ecology (Chapter 22), etc.

The regulatory capacity of the territory plays a crucial role in another area, as illustrated in Chapters 12 and 13 in relation to the production of palm oil and rubber: by supplementing, stimulating or qualifying the capacity for innovation and coordination within agricultural chains (Biénabe *et al.*, 2017a), it paves the way for the necessary reconciliation between economic and commercial dynamics and the challenges of sustainable development. As Giraud (2017) points out in his Foreword to *Sustainable development and tropical agri-chains*, 'It is at the meeting point of the agri-chain and the territory that the future of agriculture will largely be determined.' We have also shown in this book, especially in Chapters 12 and 13, that while it does not solve all the problems, the territorial anchoring of economic sectors allows local actors to take on the risks brought about by the volatility of investments and production circuits and the asymmetry of power relationships. It allows them to negotiate and define the terms of a sustainable development.

The seductive hypothesis of the territory as a privileged setting for the emergence of collective actions must however not lead to an idyllic vision. The territory can be the framework of conflicts and exclusions. This is discussed in particular in Chapter 26, which shows how the processes of territorialization can involve power balances and lead to the exclusion of certain actors. The development of certain territories is also likely to occur at the expense of others, geographically close or distant.

The territorial organization can then demonstrate its capacity, or the lack of it, to take on an active role in reducing imbalances and tensions by resolving inconsistencies between individual, collective and public initiatives. In doing so, the territory becomes the privileged field of application of new governance processes, not only at the interface between collective action and public action but also at the interface between the State and the market. As Elinor Ostrom pointed out in reference to the commons at conferences in 2011 in Montpellier and Paris<sup>1</sup>, the territorial approach would henceforth more than simply compensate for the failures and correct the 'externalities' of the two conventional registers of regulation.

Asserting this capacity for regulation does not mean that the territory has to be reified. We do refer emphatically to a plurality of territorial configurations and a plurality of configurations of actors and projects inscribed in geographical spaces of varying dimensions. And we do not ignore the importance of positioning territorial processes in more encompassing ensembles. Indeed, bottom-up change by the local is not the only change that takes place. This book defends the idea that the territorial approach is also a privileged path to sustainable development at a global scale.

1. 'Neither the State nor market: organization of community resources' and 'Toward a third way between State and market for collective and solidarity management of environment and resources'.



## **THE CHALLENGES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: A RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

To better accompany territorial actors in their quest for sustainable development, the research community and development practitioners have to equip themselves to better understand and act. This is why we have devoted one part of this book to the tools and methods of territorial development. In fact, support for development constitutes one of the major issues and challenges of action research directed towards rural areas in countries of the Global South. The type of research we are defending must, in addition to its role of expertise and of technical and technological invention, also possess operational tools for observing and analyzing a complex and uncertain world. This implies being able to design, implement and/or get involved in mechanisms of accompaniment (Chapter 31). These systems and the tools used have to be adapted as necessary in order to address the diversity of situations and objectives encountered. The special role of the use of spatial information in participatory approaches for accompanying territorial development is worth noting and we discuss it partly in Chapters 33 and 34. Mental maps, zoning based on actors' representations (Caron, 2011), role-playing games, simulation games, companion modelling, participatory geographic information systems, observatories, etc.: the proliferation and the methodological flexibility of the mechanisms implemented by the research community in this area command respect. Each of these tools and mechanisms is used to represent the territory and its inhabitants and give them voice, using the power of the map to show, invent and explain the territories and the world, as well as to compare and reconcile the actors' various viewpoints. In these observation and analysis systems, the identification and interpretation of controversies, and even of conflicts, forms an integral part of territorial accompaniment. Action research aiming for an understanding of the dynamics that animate and drive territories must therefore pay attention to and attempt to understand discordant voices, as well as encourage marginalized social groups, whose voices are usually inaudible, to speak up. As we see in Chapter 31, such an approach calls into question the researchers' postures and practices, as well as their conceptual and methodological equipment, and calls for an improved formalization of the learning identified in such research. Three main lines of reflection emerge.

### **Rethinking performance and its multidisciplinary assessment**

Accompanying territorial dynamics requires a rethinking of assessment of performance. As Biénabe *et al.* (2017b) emphasize, the sustainable development goals necessitate a complete review of the measurement of performance of agricultural activities and require 'the linking of criteria, indicators, and standards resulting from, on the one hand, political trade-offs required by the local situation, and, on the other hand, a globally negotiated framework.' Such an assessment focuses on activities and their consequences at the territorial scale, as illustrated in Chapter 32 in the environmental domain. The multifunctionality of agriculture and rural spaces, as well as sustainable development, require that any assessment has to take into account a range of induced effects such as the creation or loss of jobs, carbon storage, or the risk of long-term conflicts, including distant ones. The assessment of territorial 'performance'



thus raises the question of the recognition of services and ‘disservices’ rendered, an aspect popularized by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA, 2005; Costanza *et al.*, 1997). It calls for the design of compensation mechanisms for the former, and sanctions for the latter. It raises important methodological and ethical issues, since the assessment process itself contributes to the strengthening of the competitive dynamics of territories (Chapter 3). Thus, rather than a sector-by-sector division of tasks, the imperatives of sustainable development call for new assessment procedures that are based on interdisciplinary points of view on complex subjects. Long-term assessments, over periods longer than those of specific activities or projects, increase the relevance and importance of the observatories mentioned in Chapter 34.

This challenge of assessment is thus considerable, requiring the collaboration of experts from the life, human, social and engineering sciences. It invites researchers and experts to commit themselves even more to the specific institutional mechanisms by which this assessment becomes meaningful (Biénabe *et al.*, 2017b).

### **Strengthening the regulatory scope of the territory**

Even though we have asserted that the territory has the capacity to contribute to sustainable development, this assertion deserves to be backed by better documentation, including in a comparative manner, since the questions being raised today are so new.

This book does not pretend to address every single issue that pertains to the territorial question. It restricts itself to dealing primarily with agricultural and rural spaces. Some topics require more detailed study to define the territory’s regulatory scope. While the urban dynamics, for example, are not covered in the book, they have close links with the countryside, as highlighted in several of the chapters, and any look at the territory must incorporate urban-rural relationships (Chaléard and Charvet, 2004). The rethinking of the relations between these worlds that are too often opposed is crucial.

Moreover, we agree with the conclusions of the recent book by Biénabe *et al.* (2017b) on agricultural chains to affirm how the articulation between the chain and the territory is essential for taking environmental and social issues into account. While the economic, social, political, ecological and agronomic dimensions are too often viewed and addressed each in isolation, accompanying this articulation necessitates adopting new viewpoints. Thus, territorial mechanisms must recognize and address the issues of chains, in particular those concerning the insertion of actors and macro-actors such as small and medium enterprises. In this context, we have before us a vast field of action, investigation and follow-up to commit to.

To discuss territories requires adopting an inter-sectoral and inter-territorial perspective, i.e., one of understanding and analyzing local situations in terms of their interactions with close – as well as distant – spaces and territories. More generally and together with urban-rural relationships, the forms and impacts of decentralization, public territorial planning policies and the characterization of food systems on a regional scale deserve more attention in the future. They will be essential to any realistic foresight.



The affirmation of this regulatory scope finally refers to the linkages between the local and the global, between local social and political constructs and global regimes. The territory connects actors and processes acting at different scales, imparting relevance and meaning to efforts for territorial planning. Better thought out, it will be possible to ‘avoid, on the one hand, the reliance on the very local and, on the other, the exclusive control by international mechanisms and a centralizing rationale’ (Biénabe *et al.*, 2017b).

## Thinking and acting at different scales for sustainable development

On the basis of their accumulated experience, as illustrated by this book, research and development institutions can contribute in greater measure to innovation and territorial development. There is a gap to be bridged between analyses and diagnoses conducted at a distance, on the one hand, and action research, on the other. In particular, the setting up of territorial observatories, discussed in Chapter 34, is still too dependent on the opportunities that emerge and where they emerge. The issue is of mechanisms that involve all the actors, possibly based on territorial foresight (Chapter 37), in order to identify and prioritize the situations and issues that need to be addressed. It is thus important that the proponents of these types of observatories communicate and demonstrate the value and benefits of such investments. These observatories are not solely for observation. Co-production of knowledge is conducive to more effective foresight, as well as to the design, implementation and monitoring of interventions. This is also true for the so-called ‘symbiotic’ opportunities in territorial ecology, where research can strengthen its role both in their identification and then in their design, as illustrated in Chapter 22.

More broadly, at all stages of the support of territorial development, research and development institutions can, by involving themselves in the intervention mechanisms and using appropriate tools, contribute to the identification and design of innovative and relevant solutions, the experimentation and evaluation of these solutions and their use and adaptation. The field is vast and the requirements significant when it comes to the management of living organisms or ecosystems, new technical processes to produce or process better, the funding of activities, the development of policy and standards, or the organization of public aid.

But it is unlikely that the ‘large-scale impacts’ so fervently sought by development agencies and donors to meet the challenges of Agenda 2030 will result only from a replication of local operations and success stories. Indeed, even if they are necessary and replete with valuable lessons to be learnt, success stories from one place are rarely reproducible and extrapolatable elsewhere because of their specificities, the volume of resources to be invested, and the need to act at different scales to induce changes. The territory, insofar as it makes it possible to innovate and increase the actors’ control over transformations, is an essential link in designing and experimenting with new forms of intervention adapted to each situation. And because it connects public and collective actions, it is also ideally placed to link local, national and international actions and to play a primary role in a multiscale engineering of sustainable development.



Thinking about territories and their place today and tomorrow in the processes of change and of development has to be done in a long-term perspective. Only then can we expect to build a different future together, locally as well as globally. For this reason, foresight approaches must help us to project territories in various evolutionary trajectories to use 'the future to change the present to change the future' according to the catchy formula of Sourisseau *et al.* in Chapter 37. After a period of circumvention of the State and given the challenge of rehabilitating public action, what is taking place is nothing less than a reappropriation of territories – and thus of their own destinies – by the actors, including in political construction at more encompassing levels, especially at the national level. Building on the regulatory role of the territories is a promising way to ensure coherence and peace, i.e., to progress towards sustainable development. The rediscovery of the local and its mobilization to reconstruct the global, to remake the world, is a political project.

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